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SUBJECT: BUILDING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE THROUGH SUPPORT OF GEORGIA'S
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

1. Summary and Context: The Public Affairs Section (PAS) in Tbilisi developed and executed a robust public diplomacy strategy to support Georgia's parliamentary elections on May 21, taking into account the challenging political environment with powerful domestic political tensions and a looming crisis in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In preparing the strategy, PAS first identified three target issues: helping develop a Georgian political culture; explaining the need for democratic solutions in which election results are accepted; and explaining the role and mechanics of electoral procedures, including election monitoring. PAS then designed public diplomacy programming around these issues targeting first time voters; journalists and the media; the general public and the academic elite and reaching Georgians throughout the country through the media, person-to-person contacts, and alumni outreach. End Summary.

Public Service Announcement: Many Voices - One Georgia

2. "We have polyphony in our singing; why can't we have it in our political life?" These words, from a noted Georgian painter, inspired PAS to produce a public service announcement promoting political plurality and voter participation in the parliamentary elections. Playing on the dual meaning of "khma" - Georgian for both voice and vote - the PSA features one of Georgia's most beloved and well-known polyphonic songs sung by Georgians in different regional costumes, including Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azeri, Armenian, and Russian, representing Georgia's minority communities, including from the conflict zones. As the PSA begins, singers fill a darkened stage, ending with a richly varied picture of the country, to the voice-over message "For Polyphony every voice is important. Use your voice (vote) for Georgia." Georgian Public Broadcaster aired the PSA 70[w] times between the hours of 1:00 pm and 12:00 am in the fifteen days weeks prior to the elections.

Why Should I Trust a Parallel Vote Tally (PVT)?

3. PAS worked with Georgian Public Broadcast to develop a talk show featuring Georgian experts from the NGO sector on election procedures to counter the widespread lack of understanding of how election results are verified. Among other issues, the experts discussed parallel vote tallies (PVTs), exit polls, and the role of election monitors. The show aired during prime time on the last Friday before the elections. Film clips of Georgian citizens on the street asking questions about electoral procedures were answered in front of the studio by the panel of Georgian experts from NGOs active in election monitoring. Based on the number and type of SMS messages and phone calls received at the studio, the program was welcomed by the public.

20 Questions for First-Time Voters

14. PAS worked with FLEX and UGRAD exchange program alumni on encouraging first-time voters. Working with experts and volunteers, PAS first designed a quiz on election procedures and citizen's rights. Alumni, PAS staff, and representatives from two NGOs active in monitoring the elections using USAID assistance - the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (GYLA) - then traveled to eight cities across Georgia to give presentations on Georgian election law and citizen rights at twelve national and regional Universities, after which 320 students took the quiz. (The quiz could also be taken on-line via on IREX's Internet Access and Training Program's (IATP) website.) A week later, a second round quiz was given to the 60 highest scorers from across the country, and Post is planning an award ceremony hosted by the Ambassador for the second-round winners. This innovative program received national television coverage - and bounce - the morning before the elections when 20 FLEX alumni who had worked on the program were featured on a morning news show staging mock election procedures at an actual polling station as Central Election Commission (CEC) staff and ISFED observers commented and explained election procedures.

The View from the Regions

15. PAS joined Pol-Econ staff on circuit rider teams to five cities in the regions of Georgia to survey the pre-election situation. PAS staff assisted in gathering information on the state of the regional media, arranged media interviews, and coordinated speaking opportunities on election themes at one American Study Center[w2]. Analysis of local media coverage was particularly useful in evaluating balance in reporting and whether equal media access was given to all candidates. PAS staff also served as election monitors throughout Georgia on election day.

Voting in Azeri

16. PAS worked with an ethnic Azeri Muskie alumnus to speak to Azeri youths in the Azeri language about the need for bona fide civic participation in the elections. The minority regions of Georgia were identified as of particular concern due to a high voter turnout rate for the January 5 presidential election coupled with the lack of voter information in minority languages. (For these reasons the heaviest focus of Embassy election monitoring was in those regions.)

Tapping into Interest in the American Elections

17. Interest in the US election has been extremely high in Georgia, and PAS built on this interest to raise[w3] discussion of Georgian political culture. This was done through a robust electronic outreach program through our Information Resource Center (IRC). In order to reach both the broadest possible audience and to expand our client base, the IRC began a systematic electronic campaign to share information broadly connected to the U.S. elections with PAS contacts, including from the media, think tanks, academia and government by means of an open house to attract new clients.

18. PAS used a Foreign Press Center Reporting Tour to the Texas Primaries and a TV co-op to the Pennsylvania Primary to get broad media coverage of the U.S. primary elections. TV co-op segments aired to date include footage of a "Kids vote" program in which American youth are educated in politics, and a visit to the University of Virginia Center for the Study of Politics. The co-op reports were broadcast over a series of weeks on the most highly watched Georgian TV channel to favorable audience response.

19. PAS also arranged for and participated in a series of talks throughout Georgia on the American elections. Events[w4] were held at three academic institutions in Tbilisi, at Universities in Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe, and at an American corner in Batumi. Interest in the U.S. elections spilled over into active discussion of the Georgian elections, and into a comparison of our two systems. As part of PAS's first-time voter outreach programming, two American Fulbright students gave presentations on the U.S. elections at national and regional universities, and PAS plans a quiz program

on the U.S. elections as a follow-on to the first-time voter quiz cited above.

TEFFT

[w1]Steve -- they told us they would air it 8 times a day for the 15 days prior to the election. Did they only air it 70 times?

[w2]these trips weren't just media focussed -- they also met with party representatives, etc. please round this out more

[w3]raise as in to elevate or as in to instigate/encourage?

[w4]I'm not sure these were fora -- perhaps panel discussions?